



Article by Etnia Nativa

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From adobe to icon: St. Anne's Church in Aruba

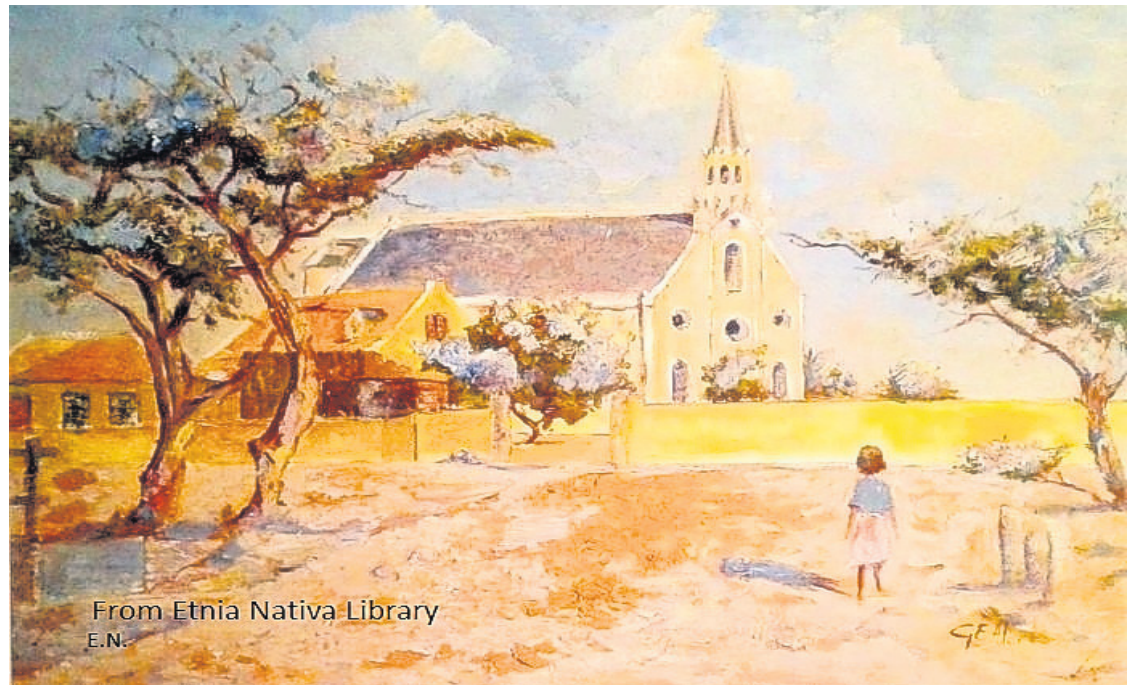
Episode CCXCVI-296

Our narratives have long emphasized the vital balance required in all that we do and tolerate, especially on a small island like Aruba. For generations, our island enjoyed a laid-back colonial existence, shaped by its unique blend of cultures. However, the neglect of our cultural heritage and the alarming threats to its biodiversity has reached critical levels. The unchecked expansion of economic development and overpopulation now pose significant challenges to our native heritage, natural habitats, and sacred lands.

This platform is dedicated to preserving the value of rediscovering native traditions and the spirit of what it truly means to be Aruban. It seeks to explore our history and identity, while emphasizing the importance of moving forward in the face of opposition. In this episode, we share the story of one of Aruba's most beautiful Catholic churches, which began as an adobe structure.

In 1824, St. Anne's Church in Noord began as a mud or adobe structure. In 1878, it became independent from the St. Francisco parish and appointed its first priest, Father Te Riele, who came from Curaçao. Father Te Riele immediately began building a priest's house while temporarily residing in a schoolroom. The small stone church, built in 1831, was soon renovated and consecrated on St. Anne's Day, July 26, 1885. The church was modernized in 1886 and remained in its original state until 1916, when the current Noord Church was built some distance from the original structure. Today, St. Anne's Church, the oldest church on the island, serves as the center of the third parish of Aruba.

Around 1886, many Dominican priests arrived in Aruba to undertake the spiritual care of the Aruban population. The secular priest, who had previously served, either left or grew old with the passing years. Residents of Noord recall that, due to a lack of funds to build the stone church, the collaboration of all—adults and children alike—was necessary. Pastor Tomas, who was in charge of the church at the time,



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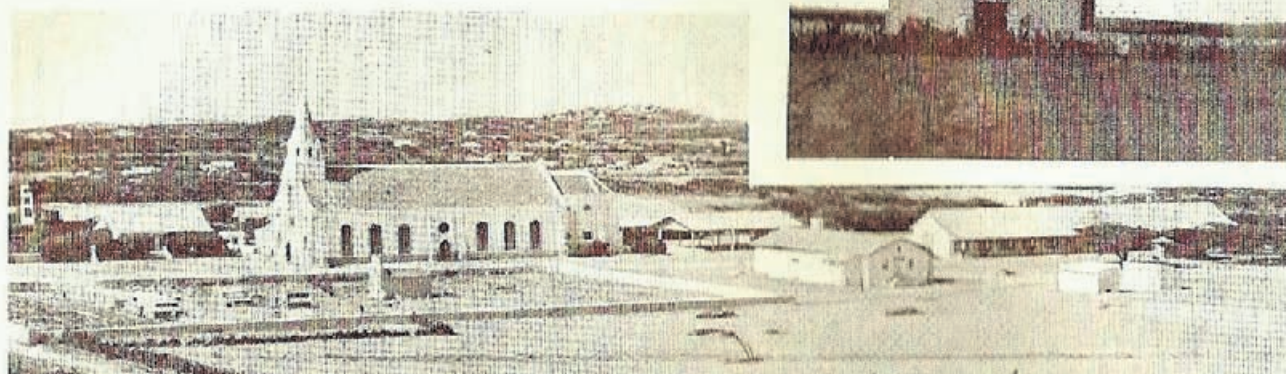
asked the children to help with the rebuilding process. After school, they had to report to be sent to the countryside to collect natural stone blocks from the nearby hills. These were heavy stones that could only be carried on the children's heads, as there was quite a distance between the picking site and the location where the new church was to be built. In this way, the entire local community contributed in one way or another to the construction of the new stone church.

At that time, the church was known as the Church of Mount Calvary, as well as St. Anne's Church—the name it still holds today. Three local residents were entrusted with the keys to the church and were responsible for its upkeep. These three Noord residents—Jan Hendrik Semeleer, Manuel Wolff, and Nicolas Tromp—were designated by the government as 'church keepers,' and

they oversaw the construction of the current cemetery next to the church in 1827.

Information has been recorded about two of these 'church keepers.' It is known that Jan Hendrik Semeleer, the ancestor of all those who carry this surname in Noord, owned a plantation in the southern part of present-day Noord, between Koyari and Washington. Another 'church keeper,' Manuel Wolff, married Ana Catharina Silvester between 1813 and 1829. He was a descendant of the old families of Alto Vista, and they had eleven children. The third 'church keeper,' Nicolaas Tromp, was descended from Daniel Pietersz Tromp, a person we believe his descendants have been on the island since before the Dutch colonial era. □

Noord's first stone church (1885). The church bell did not arrive before 1909; it was presented by a Protestant. In 1914, a beginning was made with the construction of a new church in replacement of the old one.
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If you really enjoyed reading our stories and are interested in interacting and learning more about our island's true identity, there is no better choice than Etnia Nativa—the only 'living museum of its kind in the Caribbean.' It's a fascinating opportunity, a trendsetter since 1994, and a co-founder of Islands National Park, the Archaeological Museum Aruba, and numerous Artisan Foundations, among others. Etnia Nativa shares valuable knowledge and connects you with the ancient spirit and soul of the island. We recommend booking a visit via WhatsApp +297 592 2702, as visits are private and by appointment only. You can also reach us at etnianativa03@gmail.com